

ARTICLE ALERT

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August 2009

DEMOCRACY & GLOBAL ISSUES

1. Biba, Erin **SECOND LIFE** (Wired, vol. 17, no. 8, August 2009, pg. 98-101, 122-123)

Raul Cano is a microbiologist who made a huge sensation in the scientific world in the 1990s when he successfully revived a microbe extracted from a lump of amber. This feat, performed on bacteria similar to yeast, opened a new understanding of the capabilities of microorganisms, and made real what had only been considered theoretically possible prior to that time. Cano had hopes that his process might bring back to life other organisms that could have potential as medicines or antibiotics, but no biomedical miracles emerged from the company he started. The effort folded in the late 1990s and Cano went on to other work, but in 2006 a chance encounter put the prehistoric yeast in the hands of a brewmaster. His experimentation has led to the creation of Fossil Fuel, a beer that is soon to be marketed in California restaurants and bars. A brewery capable of bottling the beer has signed on to the project with an aim to wider distribution in the future. Currently available online at http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/17-08/ff_primordial_yeast, under a different title.

2. De Kecker, Kris **THE MONSTER FOOTPRINT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY** (Low-Tech Magazine, posted June 16, 2009)

The author notes that, for most of the modern industrial era, durable equipment such as cars, refrigerators or washing machines consumed more energy over their lifetime of use and operation than during their manufacture. The advent of computer technology has turned this situation upside down -- vastly more energy is required in the manufacture of computers and other electronic gadgets than they consume. Most of that embodied energy is in the microprocessors, which can be six orders of magnitude greater than

for conventional manufacturing processes, and the energy required during manufacture keeps growing, as bigger and more powerful computer chips are needed for graphics and video games. This is exacerbated by the fact that high technology is evolving quickly, and equipment becomes obsolete after only a few years. Recycling is not the complete answer, notes the author; addressing technological obsolescence would be the best approach to lowering the ecological footprint of digital technology. Available online at <http://www.lowtechmagazine.com/2009/06/embodied-energy-of-digital-technology.html>

3. Di Silvestro, Roger **HABITAT SAVED** (National Wildlife, vol. 47, no. 5, August-September 2009)

The author describes how a non-governmental organization and the publisher of this magazine, the National Wildlife Federation, has successfully challenged environmentally destructive government policies in court. One decision limiting the availability of federally-issued flood-plain insurance, that encourages development of habitat uninsurable by private companies, will help preserve endangered Key deer in Florida, killer whales in Washington State's Puget Sound, and black bears and cypress forests in Mississippi's Yazoo River Basin. Global warming, the author says, makes such areas more vulnerable to flooding, and "business as usual in floodplains is changing." Currently available online at <http://www.nwf.org/NationalWildlife/article.cfm?issueID=130&articleID=1757>

4. Kennedy, David M. **FDR'S LESSONS FOR OBAMA** (Time, vol. 173, no. 26, July 8, 2009, pp. 26-29)

The author, a professor at Stanford University, notes that Barack Obama took office amid circumstances similar to those of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Kennedy writes that the big question is if, like Roosevelt, Obama can seize the moment and come up with solutions. Roosevelt used the Depression as an opportunity to revolutionize American life for generations to come, realizing the irony that a Depression made achieving those objectives possible. Kennedy writes that Obama, who similarly faces an economic downturn and massive unemployment, may use his circumstances to bring about health care reform and other programs he considers necessary to improving the public welfare. Currently available online at http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1906802_1906838_1906745,00.html

5. Quart, Alissa **EXPENSIVE GIFTS** (Columbia Journalism Review, vol. 48, no. 2, July/August 2009)
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Shepard Fairey, famous for his red and blue Obama silkscreen "Hope," is a proponent of "free culture," a stance that advocates open sharing of intellectual property. This "economy of giving" is a hallmark of the new digital reality. However, the Associated Press (AP) and the photographer who shot the photo Fairey appropriated for his art claim copyright, and the AP sued the artist for copyright infringement. For many, the debate hinges on whether or not open, participatory culture will destroy useful, traditional journalism institutions. It also illuminates the vagueness of "fair use" under copyright law. The author examines the ethics and importance of money and attribution in the emerging dispensation of the "gift economy." Currently available online at http://www.cjr.org/feature/expensive_gifts.php?page=1

6. Tangle, Laura **FEELING THE STING** (National Wildlife, vol. 47, no. 5, August-September 2009)

Scientists speculate that the huge jellyfish swarms that have been appearing worldwide may not be a normal, periodic jellyfish bloom, but something more. A 2008 National Science Foundation report says the massive jellyfish blooms reported in the Black Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, the Mediterranean Sea, and elsewhere, could be increasing "because of human activities." Scientists cite overfishing and pollution as primary culprits. The blooms, which have had negative impacts on beach tourism, could signal a marine ecosystem severely out of balance. Currently available online at <http://www.nwf.org/NationalWildlife/article.cfm?issueID=130&articleID=1758>

7. Wald, Matthew L. **IS THERE A PLACE FOR NUCLEAR WASTE?**
(Scientific American, August 2009)

Yucca Mountain was supposed to be the answer to the U.S. nuclear waste problem, but after 22 years and \$9 billion, that vision is dead. Now, some say that doing nothing in the near term may be the smartest solution. The Obama administration has effectively canceled the plan to store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. Spent fuel will for the foreseeable future continue to be stored on-site at 131 locations around the country. The end of Yucca means that all options for waste disposal are now in play, including recycling, use in advanced reactors and burial at other sites. Currently available online at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=is-there-a-place-for-nuclear-waste>

ECONOMIC SECURITY

8. Levy, Steven **BOOTING UP BAGHDAD** (Wired, vol. 17, no. 8, August 2009, pg. 102-107)

Nine executives from information technology companies traveled to Baghdad earlier this year, hoping to spark some ideas on how a new wave of development and innovation might be kick-started in the war-ravaged economy. Executives from companies such as Google, MeetUp, Twitter, and YouTube were invited on the trip by the State Department because of the inspiration they might provide for breakthrough ideas. Levy's assessment of the delegation's impact is subdued at best -- in meetings with the delegation, Iraqi officials seemed to have little grasp of the self-starting ethic which has been key to the success of these companies in the Western world. Even talented Iraqi young people who in another country might be fired up with brash, optimistic energy expressed a preference to find careers and security in government jobs, rather than pursuing an entrepreneurial idea of their own. But members of the delegation still came away with optimism about Iraq's future in information technology, and take pride in one of the few deliverables of their trip -- Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih is now on Twitter. Currently available online at http://www.wired.com/politics/security/magazine/17-08/ff_iraq

9. Mousseau, Frederic **TOWARD A FUTURE WITHOUT WANT** (World Policy Journal, vol. 26, no. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 73-81)

With food riots, high food prices, increasing number of the world's hungry and declining food production in developing countries, the world has to change its agriculture and food policies drastically, says the author, a policy adviser for Oxfam Great Britain. He argues against strategies supported by many developed countries, such as genetically engineered crop varieties, a free-market approach to food production and distribution, and the World Bank's proposal to create a global food reserve. He writes that genetically modified crops have been largely irrelevant to most farmers in the developing world. Governmental support for and protection of farmers against market fluctuations, including floor prices for certain commodities, have in fact worked in Brazil and Indonesia. In his view, the food crisis should be addressed at the local, national and regional levels rather than through creation of a new global mechanism. Mousseau concludes that each nation must find the right combination of policies and interventions adapted to its specific context. Currently available online at <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/wopj.2009.26.2.73>

10. Stix, Gary **THE SCIENCE OF ECONOMIC BUBBLES AND BUSTS**
(Scientific American, July 2009)

The worst economic crisis since the Great Depression has prompted a reassessment of how financial markets work and how people make decisions about money. The worldwide financial meltdown has caused a new examination of why markets sometimes become overheated and then come crashing down. The dot-com blowup and the subsequent housing and credit crises highlight how psychological quirks sometimes trump rationality in investment decision making. Understanding these behaviors elucidates the genesis of booms and busts. New models of market dynamics try to protect against financial blowups by mirroring more accurately how markets work. Meanwhile, more intelligent regulation may gently steer the home buyer or the retirement saver away from bad decisions. Currently available online at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=the-science-of-economic-bubbles>

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

11. Christia, Fotini; Semple, Michael **FLIPPING THE TALIBAN**
(Foreign Affairs, vol. 88, no. 4, July-August 2009)

According to Christia, assistant professor of political science at MIT, and Semple, a regional specialist on Afghanistan and Pakistan, peace in Afghanistan requires the sort of reconciliation that enables insurgents to realign with the Afghan government. That is not so fanciful in Afghanistan, where one of the rules, after decades of war, is to side with the winner. "Thus in Afghanistan, battles have often been decided less by fighting than by defections," the authors say. "Changing sides, realigning, flipping -- whatever one wants to call it -- is the Afghan way of war." Neither the Karzai government nor the U.S. government has made reconciliation a high priority and, worse, both have harassed potential cooperators sufficiently to drive them to the insurgency. A successful reconciliation program would have to offer each fighter a little pay and respectability and recognize the tribal links and traditions of each group. It would not much persuade foot soldiers to put down their arms, but build alliances with commanders and their troops.

12. Fuhrmann, Matthew **SPREADING TEMPTATION: PROLIFERATION AND PEACEFUL NUCLEAR COOPERATION AGREEMENTS** (International Security, vol. 34, no. 1, Summer 2009, pp. 7-41)

Fuhrmann, assistant professor of political science at the University of South Carolina, notes that "proliferation-proof"

nuclear assistance does not exist. Transfer of nuclear technology and know-how for peaceful purposes invariably leads to the development of weapons programs, and countries that have received such assistance are more likely to produce nuclear weapons, especially when facing security threats. A study of two thousand civilian nuclear cooperation agreements over the past half-century bears this out. Fuhrmann writes that the link between civilian nuclear cooperation and proliferation is surprisingly broad, and casts doubt on convention wisdom. He argues that major nuclear suppliers such as the U.S. should reconsider their willingness to assist other countries in peaceful nuclear cooperation. Available online at

http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/project/58/quarterly_journal.html

U.S. SOCIETY & VALUES

13. Gladwell, Malcolm **HOW DAVID BEATS GOLIATH: WHEN UNDERDOGS BREAK THE RULES** (New Yorker, May 11, 2009)

Utilizing examples that include a girl's middle school basketball team, Bedouin insurgents led by T.E. Lawrence in Arabia, and David vs. Goliath, Gladwell shows how effort, using a "full-court press" strategy, can succeed against opponents of greater power and ability. Attitude, innovation and the will to operate outside the establishment are keys. "We tell ourselves skill is the precious resource and effort is the commodity ... it's the other way around," he writes. Currently available online at

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/11/090511fa_fact_gladwell

14. Monan, J. Donald **VALUE PROPOSITION** (Boston College Magazine, vol. 69, no. 3, Summer 2009, pp. 24-27)

The author, former president of Boston College, addressed a group of higher education leaders at a Boston hotel on the purpose of a liberal arts education. From his perspective, Monan notes that liberal education has been weakened by a variety of factors, including the pressures for specialized skills in a mobilized society and, within the undergraduate college itself, the increasing specialization, departmentalization, and consequent isolation of faculty members and their offerings. Instead, American higher education should be directed almost exclusively at the intellects of students through the communication of truths, skills, habits and qualities of intellect. Liberal education should aspire, at its deepest level of intention, to educate for the enriching and constructive exercise of liberty. Currently available online at

http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/summer_2009/features/value-proposition.html

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